United Nations A/59/317

General Assembly

Distr.: General
31 August 2004

Original: English

Fifty-ninth session
Item 102 of the provisional agenda*
Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 58/149 of 22 December 2003 on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa and draws on information received from a number of United Nations entities consulted. It updates the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth session (A/58/353) and contains an overview of developments and activities, more detailed regional updates, information about specific areas of inter-agency cooperation, including on refugee women, refugee children, education, HIV/AIDS, environmental management, internally displaced persons, progress on durable solutions, staff and refugee security, and an overview of cooperation with regional organizations in Africa. The period covered is 2003 and the first half of 2004.

* A/59/150.

** The late submission of the present report is due to lack of resources and the need to obtain up-to-date information from field offices and other United Nations entities.

04-47542 (E) 071004

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I. Introduction

1. The year 2003 brought progress in terms of peace processes and prospects for durable solutions in Africa. The number of refugees in Africa fell from 3.1 million in early January to 2.9 million by the end of the year, a decrease of 8 per cent. While some 280,000 new refugees were registered during 2003, primarily in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (140,000) and West Africa (110,000), an estimated 340,000 refugees were able to return home, either with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or spontaneously. A number of voluntary repatriation programmes neared completion: Eritrea, north-west Somalia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Angola. For a number of other protracted refugee situations, positive developments on the political front raised hopes for eventual voluntary repatriation, including to Liberia, southern Sudan and Burundi. A significant decline in the refugee population was reported for East Africa and the Horn of Africa, which was mainly linked to the cessation of refugee status for Eritrean refugees in the Sudan. UNHCR facilitated the resettlement of some 14,050 refugees from Africa during 2003.

2. In 2004, the number of refugees in Africa has continued to decrease.

3. In March 2004, in an attempt to raise the profile of the unique potential for sustainable return, UNHCR convened a "Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa". Delegates from African States and other interested Governments, United Nations agencies, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) agreed that the current positive developments in Africa needed full international support to secure durable peace and sustainable voluntary repatriation of refugees and other displaced persons. There was widespread recognition that conflict prevention, early warning and conflict resolution required a multidimensional and regional approach, led by the African countries themselves, with multilateral support from the African Union, subregional organizations and the United Nations.

4. The situation in Western Darfur province of the Sudan continued to cause concern, with some 200,000 refugees from Darfur having crossed into Chad and up to 1.5 million displaced persons within the Sudan.

5. There were also a number of smaller yet important refugee situations and significant urban populations which required sustained protection, assistance and durable solutions interventions. In those protracted refugee situations where no durable solutions were within immediate reach, efforts to enhance self-sufficiency were pursued.

6. The challenges of HIV/AIDS, sexual and gender-based violence, physical security, xenophobia, environmental degradation, food insecurity and other impediments to refugees' enjoyment of basic rights were evident. The situation of refugees and displaced persons in many parts of Africa remained precarious.

II. Regional overviews

A. East Africa and the Horn of Africa

7. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, instability continued in most parts of southern Somalia (Somali refugees from this region remained mainly in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen), whereas north-west Somalia ("Somaliland") and north-east Somalia ("Puntland") remained relatively stable. Repatriation of Eritrean refugees from the Sudan continued throughout 2003 with some setbacks. Positive developments in the peace talks on the Sudan gave rise to hopes for the return of some 600,000 Sudanese refugees over the next few years.

Eritrea

8. UNHCR supported the Government in providing international protection and material assistance to some 4,000 camp-based Sudanese and Somali refugees as well as to almost 200 urban asylum-seekers and refugees. New registration systems were installed in 2004, allowing for better planning of targeted assistance projects.

9. UNHCR promoted and facilitated the voluntary repatriation of some 9,500 Eritrean refugees from the Sudan in 2003 and 8,300 until mid-2004. All returnees received a first-phase reintegration assistance package of shelter, food, non-food and cash grants. Further community-based reintegration projects were implemented in the sectors of agriculture, crop production, education, health, sanitation and water. Over 100,000 returnees, most of whom had returned prior to 2002, received reintegration assistance in the main areas of return. A letter of understanding was signed by UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government to ensure food aid and recovery assistance, minimizing the impact of the drought on returnees. A new registration system for refugees was established to facilitate identification and durable solutions.

10. UNHCR engaged development actors to address medium to long-term reintegration needs. Although some progress was achieved in this area, lack of funding remained a problem. The continuing border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as severe drought, continued to affect the social, economic and security environment. The absence of refugee legislation also affected the quality of protection and asylum for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Ethiopia

11. The security situation in the Gambella region in western Ethiopia deteriorated during the reporting period. Several ethnic clashes in and around the Dimma and Fugnido refugee camps resulted in the deaths of 148 persons (16 refugees and 132 nationals) and injury to a further 24 persons. United Nations and other agency staff were twice relocated out of Gambella because of ongoing insecurity in the area. During the first half of 2004, UNHCR and its implementing partners had no access to the Fugnido, Dimma and Bonga Sudanese refugee camps. Delivery of humanitarian assistance was affected and the development of the Odier-Bol campsite for the relocation of 24,500 Nuer and Dinka refugees from Fugnido had to be postponed.

12. In addition to providing protection and material assistance to refugees in Ethiopia, UNHCR also promoted voluntary repatriation for Somali refugees to

north-west Somalia ("Somaliland"). UNHCR assisted the repatriation of 9,000 of these in 2003 and about 4,400 during the first half of 2004, enabling the closure of the Hartisheik Somali refugee camp. However, repatriation was slowed down at the request of the "Somaliland" authorities owing to lack of absorption capacity and the planned repatriation from Aisha camp was not possible because of the presence of landmines.

13. Following a government directive in mid-May 2004, UNHCR relocated 7,000 Eritrean refugees from the Wa'ala Nhibi site, close to the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, to a new camp away from the border, thus increasing their prospects for international protection.

Kenya

14. In Kenya, some 240,000 refugees in camps and urban areas enjoyed asylum. Some 8,000 mainly Sudanese and Somali refugees arrived in 2003 or were granted individual refugee status in 2003. Some 2,000 Somali refugees who fled into Mandera in the first quarter of 2004 returned to their places of origin after negotiations supported by the authorities and the international community resulted in ending the conflict which had led to their flight. UNHCR also worked to facilitate and promote repatriation and assisted 800 refugees to return to their countries of origin, mainly Somalia. A multisectoral approach to combat HIV/AIDS was expanded, increasing awareness and knowledge of preventive patient care among the camp population. UNHCR resettled 7,300 refugees during the year, including 1,000 Somali Bantu refugees to the United States of America.

15. The majority of refugees were forced to remain in the camps where resources and opportunities for employment were non-existent, making humanitarian assistance their only means of survival.

16. Torrential rains and subsequent floods in the second quarter of 2003 affected refugee households extensively and damaged airstrips as well as transport and supply routes to the camps in Dadaab and Kakuma.

Somalia

17. The main obstacles to large-scale repatriation from neighbouring countries were the absence of basic social services and the lack of economic prospects upon return. Repatriation movements were repeatedly slowed down at the request of local authorities, who claimed lack of absorption capacity. This situation was compounded by severe drought in the north and general insecurity in the south. Human rights violations were endemic, particularly in the south. These included murder, looting and destruction of property, the recruitment of child soldiers, kidnapping, discrimination against minorities, torture, unlawful arrest and detention and the denial of due process by local authorities. Moreover, gender-based violence was prevalent, including rape, female genital mutilation of 95 to 98 per cent of the female population, early and forced marriage, and denial of education for girls.

18. Significant protection concerns arose following the "Somaliland" Presidential Decree of 23 October 2003, which stated that all "illegal foreigners" would be expelled within 45 days. The issuance of this decree caused the protection environment to deteriorate for foreigners and internally displaced persons from

southern Somalia, many of whom were compelled to seek safety and security in north-east Somalia ("Puntland").

19. UNHCR assisted over 10,000 Somalis to repatriate voluntarily from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and other countries. A total of 133 community-based reintegration projects were implemented in the sectors of community services, health, water and sanitation, transport, crop production and education in 2003. Some 10,000 children gained access to education through the construction and rehabilitation of primary schools, some 1,500 school teachers were trained and 167 returnee youths received vocational training. Some 15,000 people had their access to health-care facilities improved. In "Somaliland", Mogadishu, Qorioley, Afgoi (Lower Shabelle region) and Armo (Bari region), new or rehabilitated water systems provided some 116,000 persons with access to clean water. In all, some 38,000 returnees benefited from better economic opportunities through various income-generating projects. Some 1,200 returnees in "Somaliland" (90 per cent women) improved their families' incomes through a microcredit scheme.

Sudan

20. Progress in the Naivasha peace talks between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), with the signing in May 2004 of the three protocols that should lead to the comprehensive peace agreement, improved prospects for the large-scale repatriation of Sudanese returnees to southern Sudan. The United Nations carried out a series of preparatory activities in areas of return, including a logistics assessment in the region.

21. These positive prospects were nonetheless overshadowed by the appalling situation of displaced persons in the Darfur region of western Sudan as a result of fighting between the Government, pro-government militias and two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Consistent reports of systematic attacks on civilians, including the burning and looting of villages, large-scale massacres, gang rapes and abductions continued. Humanitarian workers were also attacked and relief convoys looted. Continued insecurity hampered access of humanitarian agencies to internally displaced persons, who suffered from severe malnutrition and the lack of basic services.

Uganda

22. One of the world's most brutal humanitarian crises, which has displaced an estimated 1.6 million people in northern Uganda, continues unabated. The rebellion by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which kidnaps children, brutalizes them and sends them out to kill their friends and relatives, has been going on for 18 years. Some 28,000 children have reportedly been abducted, nearly half of them in the two years up to May 2004.

23. The number of LRA attacks on displaced persons camps has increased since 2002, following the loss of the rebels' support bases in neighbouring Sudan. In February 2004, LRA massacred some 300 displaced persons in Barlonya camp. Numerous other attacks, typically accompanied by massacres, rape, abductions and looting, have since followed across northern Uganda. Some 45,000 children, so-called "night commuters", come into the towns every night to sleep on the streets or in public buildings for fear of abduction from villages or camps. Neither increased international attention to the crisis nor the Government's military strategy

has prevented the further deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in northern Uganda.

24. Meanwhile, UNHCR has endeavoured to ensure the provision of international protection to over 200,000 refugees, mainly from the Sudan, assist more than 178,000 Sudanese refugees to achieve food self-sufficiency in keeping with the "self-reliance strategy", facilitate voluntary repatriation for Rwandan refugees, provide international protection to 800 urban refugees in Kampala and facilitate the relocation of close to 15,000 refugees displaced from Kitgum camps by LRA attacks in 2002 to the Arua and Yumbe districts in northern Uganda, where the authorities have provided land for settlements.

25. The major constraint in refugee programmes was the continued operation of LRA around settlements in the Adjumani district (northern Uganda), which resulted in the further displacement of 26,000 refugees.

B. West Africa

26. The Sierra Leone peace process has stayed on track and security and stability have been restored in Guinea-Bissau. While the situation in Liberia has significantly improved since the deployment of peacekeeping troops and spontaneous returns are already a reality, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, unfortunately, cannot yet be characterized as stable for safe return. Regional approaches to peace-building and disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration were developed between the Governments, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations.

Côte d'Ivoire

27. Volatile security conditions and sporadic population displacements in 2003 posed significant challenges for humanitarian actors in Côte d'Ivoire, including limited access to refugee-hosting areas for UNHCR staff and other humanitarian workers. The involvement of Liberian fighters in the Ivorian conflict fuelled popular animosity towards refugees. Communities which had coexisted peacefully with Liberian refugees for many years turned against them, compromising their integration into Ivorian society. An emergency resettlement programme for some 8,000 refugees to the United States was consequently initiated.

28. Negative attitudes towards refugees were gradually dispelled through a mass information campaign encouraging harmonious cohabitation between refugees and their host community. The departure of President Taylor in August 2003 also influenced the situation of Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire positively. Many Ivorian refugees who had sought asylum in neighbouring countries in late 2002 and early 2003 returned spontaneously to Côte d'Ivoire.

Guinea

29. Guinea has provided a safe haven for refugees fleeing conflict in four out of its six neighbouring countries, namely Guinea-Bissau (1998-1999), Liberia (since 1989), Sierra Leone (since 1990) and Côte d'Ivoire (since 2002). The achievement of durable solutions has, during the past two years, significantly reduced the number of refugees currently residing in Guinea in a very difficult socio-economic and

fragile political environment, especially in the largest refugee-hosting area of Guinea-Forestiere.

30. During the reporting period, UNHCR supported the Government in providing international protection to over 185,000 refugees, mainly from Liberia and Sierra Leone, of whom close to 111,500 also benefited from basic assistance and services in the refugee camps. In 2003, UNHCR and its partners provided emergency assistance to 37,000 new arrivals, mainly from the Liberian conflict. A vigorous campaign against sexual and gender-based violence led to a rise in the number of cases reported, as refugees demonstrated increasing openness to address past and present issues. Victims received medical aid and counselling and legal action was taken against perpetrators.

31. Areas near the border were difficult to access owing to poor road conditions which deteriorated further during seasonal rains. Government reluctance to authorize sites left Ivorian refugees in difficult living conditions with accommodation in temporary collective shelters. However, protection and basic assistance to this population were provided through a concerted effort by the entire humanitarian community.

32. A registration/verification exercise for both urban and camp-based refugees was carried out in the period March-July 2004. The results showed a significant decrease in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugee population in the camps, which went down to 79,000, owing mainly to the organized and spontaneous repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees and the spontaneous repatriation of Liberian refugees.

Liberia

33. During the first half of 2003, insecurity limited access by humanitarian actors to more than two thirds of Liberia. In March 2003, the killing of two humanitarian workers led to the suspension of operations in the east of the country, with the consequence that UNHCR could not provide assistance to Ivorian refugees and Liberian returnees until the end of the year. In July 2003, the United Nations was compelled to evacuate all international staff from Liberia for a period of four weeks as rebels mounted an offensive on the capital during which the assets of humanitarian agencies were looted. The sheer scale of the humanitarian needs of the internally displaced persons, refugees and residents in and around Monrovia created immense challenges for the Government and humanitarian actors. However, as a result of an improvement in the security situation, it is estimated that since late 2003 some 50,000 refugees and thousands of internally displaced persons have returned to their places of origin. The challenge now facing the international community is the return and reintegration of some 260,000 internally displaced persons currently residing in camps and more than 300,000 refugees living in neighbouring countries.

Sierra Leone

34. After Sierra Leone's 10-year civil war, officially declared over in January 2002 with the successful completion of the disarmament and demobilization of former combatants, peace has at last returned to the country and the laborious process of recovery is progressing. Following the successful parliamentary and presidential elections in 2002, civil authority has been extended throughout the country. Over 543,000 displaced people, including refugees, have returned so far to their home areas. The assisted repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees that started in 2000

ended in July 2004, bringing some 270,000 refugees back to their country (50,000 in the reporting period), mainly from Guinea and Liberia.

35. Reintegration programmes for the returnees will continue throughout 2004 into 2005. This year, the returnee programme started preparing for the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases with increased involvement of development agencies. The main problems faced by returnees related to inadequate access to water, shelter education and health facilities. In addition, there were constraints on the social reintegration of various groups, particularly the lack of dependable, legal employment prospects for young men. Success in the implementation of development activities, along with national capacity-building, will be the crucial factors in achieving sustainable peace, security and prosperity.

36. The standards of protection and assistance provided to 55,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone improved significantly during the past two years, with all refugee families in camps now accommodated in individual family shelters. Further improvements were, however, especially needed in the water and sanitation sectors. Shortcomings in these two sectors had a particular impact on the refugee population, as was seen during the 2003 outbreak of Lassa fever, now under a certain degree of control, and the outbreak of river blindness in the camps in Sierra Leone in both 2003 and 2004.

37. During the reporting period, a settlement was established near Freetown to facilitate the local integration of refugees, mainly Liberians, who have been living in urban areas in Sierra Leone for over a decade.

C. Central Africa and the Great Lakes region

38. Despite some pockets of unrest in areas of Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, there were a number of positive developments. These included the Pretoria Agreement on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (for the potential return of 377,000 refugees) and the recent signing of understandings in Burundi between the Government and the main rebel groups (over 500,000 Burundi refugees could eventually return). In 2003, some 23,000 Rwandan refugees repatriated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi and Zambia. In the Central African Republic, the situation in the north remained tense, preventing the return of 41,000 refugees from neighbouring Chad. The new influx of 200,000 Sudanese refugees from Darfur province of the Sudan into eastern Chad was a major cause for concern.

Burundi

39. The political and security situations in Burundi have significantly improved since the end of 2003. The main rebel group, the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD), is now part of the transitional Government. There are also ongoing contacts between the Government and the Front national de libération (FNL), the last remaining rebel group. Ninety-five per cent of the country is now considered relatively safe. As a result, large numbers of refugees are electing to return to Burundi, mainly from the United Republic of Tanzania. Some 82,000 Burundi refugees returned home in 2003, over 55,000 in the first half of 2004.

40. Although refugees are returning in large numbers, there are still many refugees (especially in one camp) who indicate that owing to their past experience with elections in 1993, they will remain in asylum until some outstanding issues are resolved, namely property restitution, the reform of the army and the establishment of an effective disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration programme. The other refugee group which may not wish to return represents the "old caseload", those who fled in 1972.

41. Together with other United Nations partners and NGOs, UNHCR worked towards reinforcing the reintegration aspects of the return within Burundi. Memorandums of understanding were signed with other agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank.

42. The Security Council resolution approving the deployment of the United Nations operation in Burundi on 21 May 2004 (resolution 1545 (2004)) was a major step towards achieving a secure environment for the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Burundi collected information on alleged human rights violations and conducted on-site visits to verify the information. OHCHR also visited camps for displaced persons in the provinces of Ruyugi, Gitega and Bujumbura, in cooperation with the inter-agency Groupe technique de suivi, a technical group that works to protect internally displaced persons, which is composed of members of United Nations agencies, representatives of concerned government departments and international and national NGOs.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

43. A power-sharing transitional Government of national unity was installed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in June 2003, following which UNHCR started to plan for the return of some 350,000 Congolese refugees from neighbouring countries. Although the transitional Government struggled during the reporting period to restore order in this vast country, the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and the Ituri district in Orientale Province in the north-east still experienced sporadic fighting. In May and June 2004, fighting erupted in Bukavu between national army loyalists and dissidents, resulting in an outflow of almost 20,000 refugees into Rwanda and Burundi.

44. The repatriation plan will be implemented in a phased manner depending on the political and security situation in areas of return. Against this background, UNHCR conducted a preliminary assessment of the situation of Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries in preparation for possible repatriation to stable parts of the country, such as southern Katanga.

45. Improved access to previously inaccessible areas enabled UNHCR to repatriate some 15,000 Rwandan refugees in 2003, thus complementing the repatriation programme for ex-combatants as part of the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration process. UNHCR pursued basic humanitarian assistance for 160,000 refugees in rural areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some of whom have lived there for decades. All protracted refugee groups with access to land were involved in agricultural subsistence activities and in spite of the adverse socio-economic conditions, 60 to 80 per cent of

these refugees became nutritionally self-reliant by the end of 2003. UNHCR sought to support the administrative bodies in the implementation of the recently adopted refugee law, providing institutional support to the National Eligibility Commission.

Chad

46. The main objectives in Chad were to respond to the emergency operation following the massive influx of Sudanese refugees from the Darfur region into eastern Chad towards the end of 2003 and throughout the first half of 2004, as well as to address the needs of the 41,000 refugees from the Central African Republic who arrived in southern Chad in December 2002.

47. In eastern Chad, UNHCR faced the largest and most complex refugee operation worldwide during the first half of 2004. In a race against time, harsh meteorological conditions and poor or non-existent infrastructure, UNHCR managed to relocate 122,000 refugees to safe locations away from the border.

48. The refugees were relocated to nine camps, where one of the most preoccupying challenges was the lack of water and the urgent need to pre-position enough food for the rainy season. UNHCR also developed a comprehensive protection strategy to address the needs of the refugees, victims of dramatic episodes of violence in Sudan, including in many cases sexual and gender-based violence.

49. In southern Chad, UNHCR provided assistance to some 41,000 refugees from the Central African Republic who had fled fighting in the north towards the end of 2002. Poor road conditions constituted a major constraint in delivering relief assistance to the refugee population. During the rainy season, access to refugees was very difficult, if not impossible. UNHCR provided technical assistance to the Government of Chad for the registration of refugees. Temporary registration cards were distributed to all refugee families from the Central African Republic.

Rwanda

50. In Rwanda, a total of 23,300 Rwandan refugees returned home during 2003 and Rwanda continued to encourage the return of the remaining Rwandan citizens living in various countries in the region, despite concerns about the sustainability of continued refugee returns, given the population density. Throughout 2003, UNHCR concluded tripartite agreements with seven countries currently hosting Rwandan refugees, establishing legal and operational frameworks for their voluntary repatriation. However, the complexity of the remaining caseload posed definite challenges to UNHCR, as well as to the countries of asylum and to Rwanda itself.

51. UNHCR continued to provide assistance to 36,600 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo settled in the Kiziba and Gihembe refugee camps. The Office also supported the Government in setting up a council to take over refugee status determination in 2004.

D. Southern Africa

Angola

52. During 2003, a total of 133,000 Angolan refugees repatriated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia. Of these, some 76,000 refugees repatriated with the assistance of UNHCR and its partners (43,000 in organized convoys through four corridors of return and 33,000 spontaneous returnees who received assistance upon arrival in Angola). Organized movements resumed in May 2004 with 2,000 refugees returning in convoys by 30 June, while a further 6,000 spontaneous returnees were assisted upon arrival in Angola. To facilitate the repatriation process, UNHCR substantially increased its presence in the major returnee areas, establishing nine new offices in bordering provinces.

53. Upon arrival in Angola, refugee returnees spent three to four days in one of a network of nine reception centres established by UNHCR in areas of return, attending awareness sessions on landmines and HIV/AIDS, food and non-food items, such as kitchen sets, blankets and construction kits. Children were issued with birth certificates. Other reintegration assistance included the provision of Portuguese-language training for returnee children to facilitate their entry into the Angolan education system, the distribution of seeds and tools to facilitate self-sufficiency, peace and reconciliation initiatives in return communities and the establishment of a women's community centre. In addition, the absorption capacity of the areas of return was enhanced through the construction and rehabilitation of 19 schools, 12 health posts, 2 municipal hospitals, 36 water points and 50 latrines.

54. The lack of access to return areas owing to landmines, destroyed bridges and poor road conditions prevented repatriation to approximately 40 per cent of the key areas of refugee return. Another major constraint was the lack of adequate implementing partners in the main areas of return. The attention of the Government, United Nations agencies, NGOs and donors focused on the densely populated central highlands, where most of the internally displaced persons and former UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) fighters had returned. The less densely populated border provinces to which refugees were returning continued to be neglected. UNHCR strongly encouraged greater efforts to be made in future by the Government and others to facilitate the return and reintegration of refugees in the more sparsely populated border provinces of Angola.

55. To implement the voluntary repatriation operation, UNHCR worked closely with the Governments of Angola and countries of asylum, as well as other agencies, including WFP, UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and national and international NGOs. OHCHR contributed to the establishment of a Thematic Group on Human Rights within the United Nations country team, dealing, inter alia, with the rights of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons.

South Africa

56. South Africa hosts the largest number of urban refugees in southern Africa. The total number of persons of concern in 2003 was 110,600, of whom 26,500 were refugees and 84,100 were asylum-seekers. In 2004, the number of asylum-seekers increased by 6,785, bringing the number of persons of concern to UNHCR to 117,500. Some 11,100 persons received emergency short-term assistance. Legal

assistance was provided for 5,230 cases by UNHCR-funded legal counselling offices in all the main refugee areas.

57. In 2003, refugees became eligible for the public HIV/AIDS treatment and care programme and refugee children were granted access to primary schools. The Department of Home Affairs issued refugee identity cards to 91 per cent of applicants.

58. The phenomenon of mixed migration movements to South Africa continued to pose a major challenge. Syndicates which pursued illegal activities abused the asylum system and tarnished the image of refugees. This phenomenon contributed to the already high level of xenophobia faced on a daily basis by refugees, leading UNHCR to embark on a sensitization drive to raise the awareness of government authorities and mobilize the support of the civil society to dispel xenophobia.

Zambia

59. UNHCR actively pursued the dual policy of protecting and assisting an estimated 200,000 refugees in 2003 and 2004, while simultaneously promoting the durable solutions of repatriation and resettlement. Economic and social empowerment programmes were also implemented for refugees who chose to remain in Zambia.

60. With the restoration of peace and security in Angola, many Angolans who were exiled to Zambia for decades expressed a strong desire to repatriate. UNHCR assisted in the repatriation from Zambia of 23,300 Angolan refugees, of whom 18,140 repatriated in 2003 and 5,167 repatriated in 2004. Over 150 refugees were also resettled in third countries.

61. While many more Angolans are expected to repatriate, others may opt to remain in Zambia. The Zambia Initiative, a project established to alleviate the combined effects of food deficits, poor infrastructure and limited access to economic opportunities for some 450,000 persons, including 100,000 refugees, benefited host communities and refugees. The progress this project has shown is very encouraging. In the 2003/2004 planting season, refugees and the local Zambian communities involved in the Initiative met their household needs and produced surplus food.

62. UNHCR also advocated for increased employment and other local integration opportunities for refugees and assisted urban refugees to obtain electronic identity cards.

III. Specific areas of inter-agency cooperation

A. Coordination of resources

63. The consolidated appeals process continued to be an important tool for coordination and strategic planning in complex emergencies in Africa. In 2004, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs launched 19 consolidated appeals for Africa, proposing programmes for a total of close to US$ 2.5 billion. During the year, some appeals, in particular those for Chad and the Sudan, have had to be revised in order to reflect increased requirements.

64. The Office's financial tracking of donors' response to the appeals showed that by mid-August 2004, the overall response to these appeals varied from 16 per cent to some 75 per cent of the revised requirements. Only the appeals for Angola and the United Republic of Tanzania and the regional appeals for the Great Lakes region, Central Africa and West Africa had received funds covering more than 50 per cent of the revised financial requirements. Underfunding seriously hampered the ability of the humanitarian agencies to respond to the massive humanitarian needs.

65. The funding situation for most of the operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, planned within the framework of the consolidated appeals process, had significantly improved in 2004, with Burundi and the Sudan the only UNHCR operations within the process which had received less than 50 per cent of the revised requirements by mid-August 2004.

66. Fewer consolidated appeals will be presented for Africa in 2005, which is a positive sign. The United Nations country teams in both Liberia and the Sudan have opted for an integrated planning process with development agencies in 2005.

67. The conclusions of four humanitarian financing studies undertaken in 2003 led Inter-Agency Standing Committee members to develop a joint needs assessment framework under the consolidated appeals process, which is now being piloted in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

B. Security of refugee settlements and staff safety

68. Security problems continued to confront many refugees in Africa, most recently and shockingly demonstrated by the appalling massacre of 151 Congolese refugees in the Gatumba transit centre in Burundi during the night of 13-14 August 2004.

69. In order to improve refugees' physical security through separating armed elements from refugee populations, UNHCR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in November 2003 agreed on a set of understandings to enhance cooperation.

70. Inadequate access to displaced and returnee populations was a recurring problem in a number of African countries, including in northern Uganda, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and most recently in the Darfur region of the Sudan and eastern Chad. This lack of access had serious effects on the physical safety, protection, health and livelihoods of displaced populations.

71. Security considerations also had important implications for staff safety and UNHCR continued to work closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners, including through the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, to coordinate issues of staff security and access to beneficiaries.

72. The regional nature of a number of conflicts in the African continent, particularly in West Africa and in the Great Lakes region, continued to challenge the United Nations system and comprehensive, cross-border approaches involving a

wide range of actors remained crucial to finding solutions to prevent or end these conflicts.

C. Assistance to and protection of refugee women and refugee children

Refugee women

73. The High Commissioner for Refugees' "Five Commitments to Refugee Women" remained the main guide for enhancing gender equality and participation for refugee women in Africa. In 2003, there was a gradual but significant improvement in female representation in camp management and leadership positions. In two thirds of African countries, the commitment on individual registration was reported fulfilled at 100 per cent, though, unfortunately, the percentage reached on documentation was lower. Most countries had a country-level strategy to address sexual and gender-based violence. Four regional training workshops on such violence have taken place since the beginning of 2003, targeting 29 countries in the region. Women continued to encounter difficulties in accessing the management of food and non-food items. Finally, only one third of countries reached 100 per cent of refugee women in the delivery of sanitary materials, mainly owing to the lack of funds.

74. In 2003, UNHCR and WFP undertook a community-based assessment of the commitments to refugee women in Uganda. In 2004, the teams collaborating on this project continued to study and document good practices for increasing women's participation in food distribution and control of food and non-food items in two more refugee camps.

Refugee children

75. The rights of refugee children continued to be promoted through strengthened inter-agency cooperation, increased field support, training and the pilot project on gender and age mainstreaming, as well as Action for the Rights of the Child activities. UNHCR continued to prioritize the five global concerns identified as particularly important for the protection of refugee children: separation; sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; military recruitment; education; and the special needs of adolescents. Reporting on these issues was streamlined in UNHCR annual protection reports and indications are that this streamlining has succeeded in focusing greater attention on them.

76. "Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children", designed, inter alia, to strengthen inter-agency collaboration to respond to the problem of forced recruitment of refugee children, were launched in February 2004. Child protection networks were established through regional inter-agency Action for the Rights of the Child steering committees in Abidjan, Nairobi and Pretoria. UNHCR, also in 2004, started deploying child protection officers to critical areas — so far to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Chad.

77. Child participation was promoted through different activities in Africa, including through direct dialogue with separated children in Sierra Leone; a radio programme on child rights in South Africa; a cross-border Action for the Rights of the Child workshop in Lusaka; training, in collaboration with UNICEF, of

Community Watch Teams in Liberia on sexual and gender-based violence and the needs of children subject to forced recruitment; support to NGOs in Kenya for a gender and child rights audit of a refugee bill; the launching of a study on exploitation and trafficking with the International Labour Organization in West Africa; and various Best Interests of the Child projects.

D. Education

78. Revision of the UNHCR Education Policy and Field Guidelines in 2003 led to an increased focus on ensuring access to primary education in Africa. To overcome low enrolment rates, particularly among girl refugees at primary level, innovative projects were launched in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia in partnership with private corporations. DAFI tertiary-level scholarships and Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize Trust Fund secondary-level education support were continued. Life Skills Education projects were pursued and expanded to include messages on HIV/AIDS, health and sanitation, the environment and landmine awareness. The Peace Education programme, endorsed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, was pursued in close collaboration with UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with the aim of ensuring programme sustainability in the longer term.

79. Quantitative and qualitative education indicators were developed to monitor and support primary education for children and to promote gender parity in Africa, in line with the related Millennium Development Goal. One in particular dealt with structured initiatives for retaining the enrolment of girls in school. These were included in the UNHCR *Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations*.[1] Furthermore, projects were launched with a specific gender focus. In Zambia, for example, an initiative was launched to promote back-to-school projects for young girls who abandoned school because of pregnancy; another included a partnership with a private sector donor to support girls' education.

80. The importance of education as a tool for individual and grass-roots development, for building durable solutions and for reducing the potential for future conflicts continued to be little understood in refugee contexts and, therefore, rarely prioritized and insufficiently funded. One UNHCR-led effort to address some of these challenges was an education forum entitled "Innovative Strategic Partnerships in Refugee Education" (INSPIRE). Two subregional meetings were being organized to support education needs within the context of repatriation. Inter-agency reference groups were expected to drive the partnership process at the country level.

E. HIV/AIDS

81. UNHCR joined the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) as a co-sponsor in 2004. The office worked to ensure that the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons were integrated in national strategic plans against HIV/AIDS and worked closely with UNAIDS, the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and NGOs to develop an integrated approach for HIV/AIDS prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. Inter-agency efforts were

made to mainstream HIV/AIDS in humanitarian responses with the aim of linking short-term interventions with longer-term comprehensive responses in a coordinated manner.

82. A knowledge-sharing initiative conducted in Akosombo, Ghana, in May 2003 drew participants from UNFPA, the International Centre for Migration and Health (ICMH), WHO, UNHCR, UNAIDS and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Delegates shared findings on the impact of conflict on women's health and the transmission of HIV/AIDS. They also worked on national and subregional plans to protect millions of displaced and otherwise war-affected women, men and children in West Africa better.

F. Environmental management

83. In 2003, efforts to limit environmental damage and degradation caused by the presence of refugees continued to be directed at mainstreaming sound environmental management into all phases of refugee operations for safeguarding asylum and the well-being of refugee and host communities, consistent with UNHCR Environmental Guidelines.

84. Translating its policy and lessons into practices, together with implementing partners, UNHCR supported a number of integrated environmental mitigation and rehabilitation projects in several countries, including Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Practical activities included environmental assessment, guided firewood harvesting, reforestation, rehabilitation, agro-forestry, sustainable agricultural practices, promotion of energy-efficient devices and practices, erosion control, promotion of environmental-friendly shelter materials, environmental education and awareness-raising. The activities were implemented with the participation of beneficiaries from both the refugee and host communities. Meanwhile, emphasis was placed on achieving cost-effective, community-based projects and strengthening collaboration with partners in addressing post-repatriation environmental rehabilitation. Monitoring and evaluating environmental impacts was also essential. Based on consultations with partners, guidelines on assessment, monitoring and evaluation will be available for field testing and finalization by the end of 2004.

G. Internally displaced persons in Africa

85. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that some 13 million persons were internally displaced in 20 countries in Africa in 2003. At more than 4 million, Sudan had the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world. Despite positive developments in the resolution of the country's long-standing north-south conflict, fighting and attacks in the Darfur area of western Sudan led to a new displacement which the Office assesses may be as high as 1.5 million persons.

86. In countries such as Somalia and parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, violence continued to drive people from their homes and sexual and gender-based violence in conflict areas such as Ituri and Kivu illustrated that the provision

of humanitarian assistance could in itself expose internally displaced persons to further violence.

87. On the positive side, internally displaced persons from Angola were able to return to their place of origin, although many of them continued to face enormous hardship, including difficulties in repossessing property and serious violations of human rights. Peace processes in a number of countries provided the basis for an improvement in circumstances for the internally displaced populations in Liberia, the Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

88. UNHCR continued to work closely with the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Unit (recently restructured and renamed the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division) to promote system-wide improvements in response to internal displacement and to assist in developing practical recommendations and tools for improved implementation of the collaborative approach on internally displaced persons.

89. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs developed guidelines to strengthen strategies within the overall Common Humanitarian Action Plan. In Guinea, the 2005 consolidated appeals process will include an integrated inter-agency strategy aimed at addressing inadequate funding levels for activities to tackle the most critical needs of internally displaced persons, returnees and other vulnerable groups. In Burundi, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs spearheaded an internally displaced persons survey, which is providing a more comprehensive and credible picture of internally displaced persons to serve as a foundation for response planning and priority focus within the consolidated appeals process. Similarly, in Liberia, a survey served as a useful tool to regularize assistance in camps as well as to plan for the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons. The Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division supported the survey process by providing technical advice on survey design, methodology and the interpretation of results.

90. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs advisers on internally displaced persons were deployed in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, the Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe to provide strategic advice to United Nations Humanitarian Coordinators and country teams. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Office led three assessment missions in Forces nouvelles-controlled areas to gather information on the protection situation and status of the displaced persons and to support the development of a response strategy for internally displaced persons.

91. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Sudan, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs field offices collaborated with the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division and other key partners, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council, to organize and facilitate training workshops on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Participation in these workshops included United Nations country teams, national and local authorities, NGOs and civil society groups. In some cases, workshops were the catalyst for additional initiatives, such as in Uganda, where follow-up included support for developing a national policy on internal displacement. The IDD supported the OCHA office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to organize a series of regional workshops, aimed at increasing awareness and developing a plan of action for internally displaced persons to address protection needs and facilitate return and reintegration.

II. Framework for durable solutions

92. The UNHCR Framework for Durable Solutions[2] consolidates information on the background, policy development and initial operational activities under three key concepts: development assistance for refugees (DAR); repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction (4Rs); and development through local integration (DLI).

93. In response to areas identified under the Agenda for Protection[1] as being in need of development for better global management of refugee problems, the Framework aimed to address several key issues, notably: the problems facing refugee host countries that might be struggling with poverty and underdevelopment themselves; the imposition of restrictive asylum regulations which limit refugees' freedom of movement and access to education, skills-training and productive livelihoods; the reintegration of returnees in post-conflict situations when there is no bridge between emergency humanitarian return assistance and longer-term construction to sustain the return process; and the common exclusion of refugees and returnees from transition and national recovery plans by Governments concerned, the donor community and other United Nations actors, leaving the risk that those returning populations whose needs are ignored may become a new source of instability within the rebuilding process.

94. It is in this context that more sustained attention to the various peace processes, conflict prevention and sustainable development efforts in Africa, including the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) process, must be strengthened.

95. Sierra Leone was one example where development and financial institutions came together with UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, with the support and political leadership of the Government, to implement the 4Rs in order to consolidate peace-building and recovery. Eritrea was another example where similar efforts were initiated and discussions were under way with other countries. The ongoing challenge, however, was to ensure that strong political support and leadership was in place to sustain and support reconstruction and recovery efforts.

IV. Cooperation with regional bodies and initiatives

96. UNHCR continued its close collaboration with the African Union on issues of forced displacement and voluntary repatriation of refugees. UNHCR funded a joint African Union/UNHCR analysis of national refugee legislation in 13 selected African countries in 2003. The recommendations from these studies were disseminated to the countries concerned by the African Union with a view to improving the legal frameworks for asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR seconded a staff member to the African Union to help build the organization's capacity to respond effectively to issues regarding refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees in the continent.

97. UNHCR and the African Parliamentary Union held a regional parliamentary conference on "Refugees in Africa: The Challenges of Protection and Solutions", in Cotonou, Benin, in June 2004 to focus on a number of important issues relating to refugees.

98. UNHCR participated in the formulation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, on the Rights of Women in Africa and signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, to implement the Comprehensive Implementation Plan to promote implementation of the 1969 Organization for African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

99. UNHCR took an active role in furthering the objectives of NEPAD by chairing the United Nations sub-cluster on humanitarian assistance and post-conflict recovery and is committed to ensuring that humanitarian issues and activities become an integral part of the development process.

100. UNHCR continued its close collaboration with ECOWAS, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2003, UNHCR held a regional meeting of all Refugee Commissioners from the SADC region to discuss issues of common concern.

V. Conclusions

101. **Voluntary repatriation continued to be the preferred durable solution for refugees and UNHCR strove to achieve this objective wherever possible, taking advantage of the tremendous potential for sustainable return currently witnessed in Africa. UNHCR also worked with other United Nations agencies and development partners to ensure that national recovery programmes included a component on the longer-term reintegration of returnees, which is vital for reconciliation and reconstruction.**

102. **As to those refugees for whom returning home was not an immediate prospect, UNHCR sought to increase their self-reliance while also addressing the needs of their host communities.**

103. **Resettlement staffing was strengthened and resettlement operations were enhanced.**

104. **UNHCR further endeavoured to improve its performance and service to refugees and other persons of concern in Africa by ensuring a strong institutional emergency preparedness and response capacity, especially to deal with sudden large-scale population movements. Planning activities included building local and regional capacities to ensure that asylum systems and protection performance conformed to international standards and that adequate reception arrangements were in place.**

105. **Dwindling funds for humanitarian emergencies and protracted refugee situations in Africa meanwhile reconfirmed the need for joint planning and pooling of resources to achieve adequate standards of protection and, wherever possible, durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons in Africa.**

Notes

[1] See www.unhr.ch/statistics, Camp Indicator Report.

[2] EC/53/SC/INF.3.

[3] A/AC.96/965/Add.1.